

Queer Newark Oral History Project

Interviewee: Kevin Taylor

Interviewed by: Christina Strasburger

Date: December 9, 2017

Location: Newark LGBTQ Center, 11 Halsey St., Newark, New Jersey

*Kevin Taylor:* La, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la.

*Christina Strasburger:* My name is Christina Strasburger, and I am here interviewing Pastor, author, host, Kevin E. Taylor at the Newark LGBTQ Community Center at 11 Halsey Street for the Queer Newark Oral History Project today, December 9, 2017.

*Kevin Taylor:* Yay.

*Christina Strasburger:* Thank you so much for taking the time to join us.

*Kevin Taylor:* Oh, this is a pleasure. It's a pleasure. It a pleasure.

*Christina Strasburger:* We appreciate it. We're gonna get started with some biographical data, and we start off with when and where were you born?

*Kevin Taylor:* I was born September 4, 1964 in Washington DC, and a lot of people talk about being from DC, and they were born in like northern Maryland or northern—I am born and raised in our nation's capital and lived in all four quadrants of the city before I moved.

*Christina Strasburger:* Okay. Who raised you? Did you grow up in one place or household or more than one?

*Kevin Taylor:* I grew up in the Green Leaf projects of southwest Washington DC raised by mother, was a single mom, Louise Taylor, and it was me and my three brothers, though I am one of eight. There's a ten-year gap between the oldest of my group and the youngest of the first

group, so our growing up did not include them. I mean, not as a presence in the house.

*Christina Strasburger:* Okay. Do you recall any events that were transitions or turning points in your early life?

*Kevin Taylor:* A few. I remember, and I'm not doing it just for the purpose of this conversation, I remember the first time a group of boys kind of were bullying, and violently chased me home screaming faggot and you punk and da, da, da, da, da, and kind of the epiphany of the five of them as a collective wanting to fight me and, in a two week window, individually all five of them hit on me. I'll be your fir—it just felt so—so I truly know homophobia as it is expressed in some people is really an outgrowth of the fear of what they see in themselves. I remember the first time, and I was a younger of the older teenage, about 15, I remember maybe—yeah, about 15. I remember the pastor I grew up with who was all love and always talked about how God's love was—I just never heard him make God anything of be afraid of. Then he died, and then the guy who came after him was the antitheses, came in high potentate robes very ugly, anti-everybody sermons, everybody was wrong, everybody needed to repent. What it felt like to tell my mother I didn't wanna go back to church, her saying baby, come back this Sunday and if he said something crazy—cause my mother was one of the mothers of the church that was downstairs in the kitchen who was cooking while service was going on and that's why people would hurry up to get finished with service cause they could smell the food cooking, so sometimes she missed some of the craziness, but she stayed upstairs for the sermon and this was a particularly homophobic sermon. I remember my mom looking at me when he made that first ugliest, first loud one and said, “alright

baby, get out and get out now,” because she was afraid of what I would do not what he was saying. She was afraid of what I was about to do. “Baby, bye. I’ll see you at home.” In service, “bye.” You know, a Baptist church, a number of churches you’re supposed to, if you’re excusing yourself, walk to the far left or right and go down that aisle because the middle aisle was reverential, especially when the word was going on, and so I purposely walked to the middle and walked backwards out of the door waiting for him to say something, but he never did.

*Christina Strasburger:* Oh, that’s quite a statement.

*Kevin Taylor:* Yeah, that’s—yeah. I was very proud of that moment.

*Christina Strasburger:* That was a lot over 15, 16.

*Kevin Taylor:* Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

*Christina Strasburger:* Okay. Well, it sounds to me like your mother was quite influential. What are some of the other adults in your life who shaped your adolescence besides the people who raised you?

*Kevin Taylor:* Oddly enough, and I know that a lot of people have conversations especially with gay men where influential figures in their lives are often celebrated people who they have no direct contact with. Somehow, they become sanctuary going into the world, but Natalie Cole was a very influential presence in my life. When I discovered her at 11 in 1975— [00:05:00]

*Jim:* Alright.

*Kevin Taylor:* Alright Jim, take good care.

*Jim:* Bye, take it easy.

*Kevin Taylor:* - when I discovered her in '75 on an afternoon talk show, I watched because it said that she was Nat King Cole's daughter, and so I knew that meant she was black because my mother was a huge Nat King Cole fan, and believe it or not, even in the 70s African American presence on television was rare, so I was like oh, good. I was sitting in the house dealing with my asthma by myself cause my brothers were outside playing, I get to see somebody black on TV, and she's saying the word inseparable, and I thought inseparable, separable, and oddly enough a week or two before, I found an old Webster's dictionary, a little paperback, I mean, a little pocket dictionary in the trash, and that was literally my daily study guide. Let's learn a new word today. I think I oughta use it in a sentence cause back in that era you were supposed to be able to spell it, define it, and use it in a sentence. I'm sure that's the rule today, kids just don't bother. She said inseparable; I thought wow, what does that mean? I-N-S-E-P separate, S-A-R-A-R-A. Okay, I spelled it so I pulled out my dictionary to define it. How do you use it in a sentence, and she sang the song and I was like we're like a flower to a tree, like words to a melody of love, there's no way we could break up, no words that could make us blow our thing cause we're inseparable. From that moment, I was in love with her. It plays out because the host, Mike Douglas, out of Philadelphia asked her when she started singing and she said she did really— she's always play it as a child. She heard it around the house because my dad and Frank Sinatra and County Basie and Ella Fitzgerald were always around the house, so she said but it really

became my journey in my junior year of college, and I didn't hear anything after that. I was like black people can't go to college, black people can go to college? Is that what you do with being smart, you go to college? I'm going to college, and so my mother came home that afternoon. I said, "Mom, I'm going to college." She said, "That's nice, baby." I'm literally 11, 12, 13, 14, "I'm going to college." One day at 16, my mom was like, "Baby, you know, we need to talk cause I can't afford college." I said, "I know mamma, that's why I'm smart because they will give you money to go to school if you're smart," and so, 16 when I got a perfect PSAT score and all of the letters started coming from colleges, she believed that something was changing.

Natalie Cole plays—Natalie Cole is a pivotal marker in my life because that 11-year-old boy learned about college from Natalie Cole. I would read every interview that ever came out of her and she was always quoting something or somebody. If she wasn't opening my mind with words that I didn't know like her third album was called unpredictable, if she wasn't doing—this will be her first hit—has I'm so glad that he found me in time, I'm so glad that he rectified my—rectified, unpredictable, inseparable, who is this woman? She was already that force of nature, but then she played an ongoing role just in a lot of ways. I remember being a kid and seeing her on the cover of a magazine and because I sucked my finger for the longest time, I felt like I never liked my mouth, I didn't know what to do with it, I didn't know what my smile was, I wasn't buck teeth cause that really happens with thumbs, so I just felt like my teeth were off center, and I never understood my smile, I never knew how you were supposed to smile, and I remember standing in the mirror one day and studying Natalie Cole's smile in the mirror beside my face, and I smiled until I figured out her smile, and I knew I got it right cause the next

day for the first time somebody said you have the prettiest smile. I was like—

*Christina Strasburger:* Instant gratification there. You talked about college, but could you talk a little bit about what schools you attended, about the neighborhood and school as well?

*Kevin Taylor:* Oh, you mean growing up?

*Christina Strasburger:* Mm-hmm.

*Kevin Taylor:* Again, I grew up in Washington, DC and I grew up in a time where you did first and second grade at one school, third and fourth at another, fifth, sixth at another, seventh, eighth, ninth, ninth wasn't in high school yet. It was first and second was William Syphax, S-Y-P-H-A-X, that's were first and second was. [00:10:00] Third and fourth was Margaret Amidon, fifth and sixth was Anthony Bowen, seventh, eighth, ninth was Thomas Jefferson High School. Then I went to high school at Woodrow Wilson high, and because of where I lived in southwest, we were bussed into a school in northwest DC, way uptown.

*Christina Strasburger:* Okay.

*Kevin Taylor:* That was a really big deal cause it also played a role in kind of galvanizing some kids from other areas cause we all would meet in our neighborhood in southwest to get on that bus, but I remember a couple of the guys did not live in my neighborhood so they had to take a bus to the bus.

*Christina Strasburger:* Okay. What were those bus rides like?

*Kevin Taylor:*

Amazing just because literally we start off in the projects and we went through Georgetown to get uptown, so they were very aspirational. Those are the real times when other kids besides my brothers that we played the that's my car, that's my house game. Something about that period, again, high school and seeing these aspirational houses that weren't part of the community we lived in really did play a role in kind of what the preparation for life was supposed to look like, who was going into military, who was going to college, doing something with your post high school life where if we had maybe been in that same neighborhood, I don't know that the aspiration would have been the same. I know that as a high school student where I was, afforded me the opportunity to start working in high school, so I have been working since I was seven—I've been working since I was 12. I've been in a professional capacity since I was 17, working for the DC office of recreation centers and playgrounds and that's official half day of school, half day at the job capacity. A lot of that had to do with the commute of leaving my neighborhood to go to school. It already began to prepare me for the transition of getting up out of here because the truth is in a lot of those small neighborhoods, a lot of people don't leave their block or blocks around their house. The supermarket is close, church was close, and you might have gotten on the bus to go downtown to do school shopping or something, but for the most part, you lived in your block and going that far for school made the idea of leaving to go to school possible, but here's what's interesting, it had to happen at that time because I was a really smart kid, I know Natalie talked about college. There was no talk of anything before that and somewhere in the seventh or eighth grade there was a conversation about a better chance, that ABC program that sent kids away to boarding school, and they

were trying to send me from southwest Washington DC to New Hampshire to the Phillip Endecott School. I remember thinking guys who sold drugs and did really bad things went to Lorton, which is a federal prison, and that was only in Virginia. Why am I being punished for being smart by being sent so far away?

*Christina Strasburger:* Oh, I see.

*Kevin Taylor:* Because there was no preparation, of course, from my mother. There wasn't any preparation from any teachers, any counselors that said, "Hey, you're a particular kind of student and you should be prepared for a transition you should be looking at"—nobody had the this is a great opportunity conversation, so it seemed like punishment.

*Christina Strasburger:* Oh, I see.

*Kevin Taylor:* I remember having a period of three—it was a while—it might have been like a month and a half, two months, where I did not go to school. My mom would get up to leave, my brothers would get up to leave, I would help prepare them. I would throw one of my shoes on the top shelf of the closet and just be like I can't find my shoes. I can't find my shoes. My brothers were like ah, we going to school. My mother would already be gone. God bless her, she just didn't make anything of coming home and the house being cleaned and dinner being done. I think its cause she just could not fathom the responsible one playing hooky. I don't know if the teacher finally called or something and my mama came to me what's going on, and I told her. **[00:15:00]** Then the teacher and I had the conversation and they were like—it was three months actually now that I think about it. I missed a whole semester, and I remember



thinking how peculiar it was that I was gone that long and nobody missed me. I think we went to school on a Thursday to have the meeting with the principal and my teachers and getting presented with a stack of work and the teacher said I had the remainder of the semester to finish it, and I turned it in on Monday.

*Christina Strasburger:* You know what I find interesting is that your brothers didn't tell your—

*Kevin Taylor:* Again, my little brothers, my younger brothers, Gary was older, and David and Douglas were younger, I just don't think they could fathom that I wasn't going to school. I was the nerd who loved school. Again, I was an exceptional student, and so nobody could imagine—what I was surprised about is that my friends weren't coming to my house saying where's Kevin?

*Christina Strasburger:* I see. To go back a little bit about the ages of your siblings cause you went to school in different—well, four different schools at that time, were any of your siblings in school with you at the same time because—

*Kevin Taylor:* It did not happen until we got to Junior High and Gary was in the ninth grade at the same time I was in the seventh grade. The funny thing about my brothers, Garry is two years older, David is two years younger, Douglas was three and a half years younger, so we were literally 10, 8, 6, 4. When you're only two grades in each school, David had just missed me, Douglas wasn't in yet. It wasn't until Gary was still in the ninth that I was in seventh. It's funny because I remember Gary's presence in my junior high school. I don't remember Gary's presence in high school. That was tenth, eleventh, and twelve. When he was in tenth, I was in eight. When

he was in eleventh, I was in ninth, right. When he was in twelfth, I was in tenth, and I think Gary might have been doing a half-year work there. I don't remember being in high school because of my absences. I had to be left back for a half a year.

*Christina Strasburger:* Wow, for a half a year.

*Kevin Taylor:* Right. I did ninth grade twice and still graduated like fourth in my class.

*Christina Strasburger:* Well, I gotta take a sip.

*Kevin Taylor:* No, you're fine. I'm doin' it while you ask the questions.

*Christina Strasburger:* Okay.

*Kevin Taylor:* It's like on television, I know.

*Christina Strasburger:* Yes, you do. What are some challenges that you faced in childhood and how you managed those challenges? You talked about bullying.

*Christina Strasburger:* I always say that I'm not ashamed to start most of my lectures. I was a fat, black, asthmatic, gay nerd in the projects. That answers all your questions. Fat was a problem inside my whole house. Black was a problem in—not really—I mean, I have the conversation now as an adult, but in DC, chocolate city and in the '70s, police weren't a problem, those things weren't a problem. Asthmatic was a really bad problem as related to little things, like my brothers after school could go outside and between not being able to overexert myself, and DC's humidity in the summer, which

is when we really go to go outside, DC's humidity could kill me because it was so bad on my lungs. That's why I was such an introvert cause my brothers were outside ripping and running, and I could not. I would either be at my house, my friend Lawrence's house, which was across the street, or church, or school. I really wasn't that kid. I often found that being smart was more of a detriment in the projects than being gay. Again, if the boys wanted to fight, often propositioned at some point. That kind of imaging went on with all my friends. Somebody who's sat on your lap or said you sit in my lap because—literally, I think girls experiment with tenderness and boys experiment with arousal. What do we do with this? I think being conscious of me—and I don't even know how conscious my friends were of my being gay cause I wasn't—I didn't have any reason to be sexual at a young age, and so I do remember that I was always longing for a closeness. [00:20:00] I remember the friend who lost a bet and after that—well, losing a bet meant he had to sit on my lap for ten minutes and we held hands while we watched a show because again, you're trying to figure out—I remember the athlete friend who in high school took a shower in our friend's apartment. I was like you live down the hall, why don't you shower in your own bathroom? I remember I don't remember how we were the only two in the house, but he left the door open so that I could watch him shower because you know—and he was always like—we would be sitting in the hallway playing around, all of us, literally playing around, talking, blah, blah, blah. When it was time to leave, I remember the time he reached down to help me up and he kinda flexed his muscle so that I—you know what I mean? There was something enduring the adoration that was never spoken, but was always part of my engagement with my friends that even played a different role like I remember my greatest memory of my mother is always an odd one

for some people, but my mother and I were downtown DC in the area that was called Chinatown because the Chinese restaurants were, that's were some of the Chinese ohm stores were, so it's probably like a little China. Back in the day, storefronts would be here's a display window, the door's all the way back here. Some of the stores in downtown Newark are like that. I'm trying to think. Where Riches used to be.

*Christina Strasburger:* Oh, I know what you mean.

*Kevin Taylor:* Yeah, Riches. It's like the windows are here, the door is here, so you could keep the display windows so people could go window-shopping. My mom was doing window-shopping, and she left me at the bus stop, and I remember an older white gentleman pulled up in a white Cadillac to ask me for directions, and when you're a little nerd, you're always appreciative of moments that adults make you feel smart. He was looking for directions, and I gave them to him from the bus stop, and he said what did you say? Come in a little closer so I can—and I was getting ready to step off the curb to come closer to give him the direction and all I heard was crash. I was like what was that, and I turned around and my mother had a broken bottle in her hand, and my mother was a little hat wearing, church going, sanctify woman. I was like what, what, and my mother looked at him, and he was stopped at a red light and she said run the light. She never moved her mouth, but I could hear her say run the light, run the light. Mother fucker, don't make me say it again. Run the light, and he peeled and ran through the red light. My mom—and I know it feels, but don't you ever talk to stran—don't you ever cause everybody doesn't mean you good. I thought—and she held me close, and I remember feeling for the first time, protected cause I was always the responsible one, I was

always the one given the food stamps to go shopping for the family. I answered the phone when the bill collectors called, so I always had more on me than a child at my age should have, and that was the one moment I remember feeling protected like I was important enough and this was big enough to cover me, but I think it played a role in my sexuality as I grew up, like the overt energy of seeing someone be to sexual with me always made me kinda step back cause it's like if you're just trying to screw, find somebody else to do that. That's not me. You gotta get to know me first. I was trying to introduce boys to my mother in tenth grade just to meet my mother cause my mother needs—I don't know whether or not my mother knows your mother.

*Christina Strasburger:* That's great.

*Kevin Taylor:* It was funny because those friends I grew up with, their mothers were friends—Lawrence was born in July of '64, Richard was born in August of '64, I was born in September, so our mothers knew each other pregnant. My best friends growing up, my mother—so, that was engrained in. When I would go to the supermarket, if one of the lady's said baby, you going to the store, yes ma'am. Come here. She had you a piece of paper with a five-dollar bill in it with her list. You'd get it, put her change back in that, hand her the change back, hand her the bag, so I was always conscious of that, and so when energy came at me as a young man that was purely sexual. It wasn't an exploratory thing for me like ooh, I get to see what that part is like. It was always for me kind of trying to see what it was like for a boy to want to spend time with me. Like, "what do we do?" I was a nerd, "You wanna get to know me, say I know you always in the library, [00:25:00] I'll meet you there." Okay. That means you're paying attention to me, not just to the fact

that I'm a fat little boy, which means fat boy meant I was pudgy, which means I had a fat butt. Don't do that. Don't do that. Don't do it. "I know what boys like you like. I'll be your first." Ain't nobody ask you to be my first. I ain't ask you for that. I'm not giving you the gift of me, and I'm sure that that level of prudishness is why I survived the AIDS pandemic cause I was 17 in '81 when AIDS hit, 17, 18. I went to college. I should have been wild and loose, and yet I was look at me, I'm Sandra D., hello. Who are you? Good morning. That's who I was.

*Christina Strasburger:* How would you describe your sexual orientation, and gender identity?

*Kevin Taylor:* I'm a gay man. I'm a proud gay man.

*Christina Strasburger:* Okay. How did you first become aware of that aspect of yourself, and how did you first learn about the existence of LGBTQ people?

*Kevin Taylor:* I don't even know. I remember being very conscious of any feeling that I saw expressed on television between a man and a woman, a boy and a girl, if I ever had those feelings, it was toward another boy. At first, I thought it was cause of closeness cause of the group of—but, my friends growing up, when we were growing up, even in that collected, this guy never had any sexual feelings for me, this guy never had any sexual feelings, this guy cause we were the closest, there might have been something kinda like we coulda dated, and then there was the one guy, I was like Mr. Flexy arm, take the shower. I know that he was conscious that I looked at him with adoration.

*Christina Strasburger:* Oh, that's so—

*Kevin Taylor:*

You know, and that was all the stuff I'll spend time, be close, I don't—yeah, it didn't take on any kind of sexual energy until high school and even then, it was kissery. I mean, even then, it was conscious but it was kissing. I dint even think about sexual intimacy until college because when you work in the projects, in tight and confined spaces, there's no space that's yours, and I was very conscious that I wasn't going to have any—I was very conscious that I wasn't gonna have any sexual experience that happened in a public place. Do you know—yeah.

*Christina Strasburger:* I understand. How did other people in your life become aware—

*Kevin Taylor:*

That was always a thing for me. That happened much sooner than it happened for me. That happened when—I remember in the third grade a girl wanted to fight me all the time, and I don't know why, I don't know if it was cause she liked me or just was conscious of it. I remember a girl saying one time in fifth grade; I know how boys like you get butts like that. I was like how? Oh God, you know, urban myths include if you suck a boy's dick and he cums in your mouth, you'll get pregnant, girls thought that. I think they thought boy's butts got pregnant. That's why your butt fat cause your butt gets pregnant. With what? Like semen is puffed rice or something. There was always that, the something that I know what boys like you and I was like, what is that based on? Honestly, I don't know if there was some sort of affectation to me. I know that growing up, the way I spoke was always a thing to people, even my own family, oh, Louise you need to—Louise, that boy talk white. Good afternoon, Taylor residence. You know, even to this day, I'm always taking it back when people say, “Yes, may I speak to Kevin Taylor?” “You're doing so.” “I'm sorry. Hello.” “I'm

sorry. What?” “You asked to speak to me. You are speaking to me. You are doing so.” Again, I think that statement of fat black, asthmatic gay nerd roles into all of that because they were a cacophony of me, and so the fact that you talked funny is the reason I thought you were—so, yeah, people saying stuff was a much more present presence than me wanting to do so.

*Christina Strasburger:* Okay. How have your racial and religious identities affected your LGBTQ identity if they have?

*Kevin Taylor:* They have. I find myself—being from Washington DC, we go later in my life, I think I went to college, I left for college at 18 and I went to Guilford College, a Quaker liberal arts school in DC, I mean, in Greensboro, North Carolina. I went from DC to North Carolina. I think when I went to college, [00:30:00] I was prepared. I was gonna find my college sweetheart, I'm gonna find my first love, we're gonna be on campus and be in love, and then by senior year, we'll move in together and then that's your move from there. It's funny because Wilson was a pretty mixed-race school. We had a pretty white population there, so I had crushes on white guys. I don't know if I—I didn't date anybody in high school, but I was open. My first boyfriend in college was white. He also offered me my ugliest racial moment in that one day in my—I think we dated all of my freshmen year, this was my sophomore year, it was early on, and in Guilford we had a fall break as well as a spring break in mid-October, yeah. I think I'd gone home for fall break and fall break, I could go right back to work. I had a pattern, left on Saturday, go on the train, my mom would make my favorite meal on Saturday night, we went to church on Sunday, I was at my desk at work on Monday, and he asked if I was going home. We had gotten back from fall break and he needed to go back home,



apparently to get something from his parents or something, something really imperative, enough for him to drive from North Carolina all the way back to Maryland. He asked if I would go with him. I told him I couldn't, I had a midterm exam in my major at the time, accounting. He's, "Aww, I'm really disappointed. I wanted you to go with me cause I wanted to go by and see your family. You come by and see my family." We met on campus, fell in love with this white dude who was gorgeous, and he said, "I wanna see your family so we'll go see my family. My family loves you. He goes, really, you think its okay? I was like of course, go by and you're not afraid to go—you lived in the hood, go see my mamma. Go see my family, my family loves you." He said, "Are you sure?" I said, "Of course, I'm sure. I said cause my mother loves you." He said, "Oh, great cause I love me some Mammy Taylor," and I thought you've been dating this guy for a year plus, and there were six white guys in the room with us cause we were out, and they were like "Oh, Buck, damn," and I was like so I didn't mishear that. Oh my God, he just said that, and it means what it means. They're all southerners and they were like, and they literally all like, "Oh my God." I was like, "Oh my go—", and I remember the room starting to spin and thinking what just happened? What just happened? He was like, "What?" and one of the dudes was like, "Buck, that was fucked up," and I was like it did happen. What was completely disturbing is that he knew my mother to be a domestic, so to say mammy was really the height of assault. He was like, "Wait, what? No, I didn't mean it. That's not what I meant."

They got up and walked out and I was like, "What's bothering me most now is wondering which time you thought nigger while we were having sex, which time. Not that I'm wondering if, I'm just wonder which. Was it when it was really good? Was it the first

time and that's what you've been thinking since?" "Kevin, how could you say that?" "How could you say mammy?" It got so bad that the guys in the camp—literally in my dorm, it divided the dorm cause—and then Quaker campuses have kind of meetings when there's conflict, and so my teacher had to—she's like, "Everybody can feel this. What is going on?" I wanted to cover him because I didn't want it to become a horrible incident, but it was such a big incident that it was the main reason that I signed up to go to London my junior year cause I needed to get away from him cause trying to avoid him the rest of that year was horrible. I met somebody that was cool and all of that stuff and I had a campus of love and support, but—

*Christina Strasburger:* Wow.

*Kevin Taylor:* The fact that I left DC and went south to meet a northerner who typified what I thought would happen in the south was a lot. Then, when I graduated, because after him I dated a Latin guy who was really sweet, from Venezuela. We dated four and a half years. Very sweet. He came to DC. I went to Venezuela. Then, after he couldn't make the commitment of moving to America [00:35:00] because he was just afraid to tell his parents, "I'm in love," and I was like, "Your sister has already called to tell me that you're marrying some woman and she's like you must come and stop this wedding." "It is a travesty!"

*[laughter]*

I remember being very conscious of an out and I prepared to be parented, so I discovered Dupont Circle DC, yeah. I still remember being conscious of walking into the LGBT center for a black and white men together meeting and watching all the black guys go and all the white guys go hhh and I was like yeah, this is not what

you all said it was. I thought it was all of us together and this is really one black man and one white man together. This isn't—"We're open to dating whomever. We're black guys but we have white friends. We're white guys. You're saying one black man and one white man together. Yeah, no thank you." Because I was in Dupont, I still even made white friends, but some I hung out with, many I hung out with cause I was trying to really find this expression of me and some were in there. I felt pulled and I felt myself being kind of black in this community and gay in this one. Perhaps the two didn't meet until I discovered the DC coalition of black, lesbian, gay men, and bisexuals. I was like here we go, we're political and social and yeah, that's it. They met in a government building downtown and that really shaped—

*Christina Strasburger:* How old were you?

*Kevin Taylor:* 23, 24, 25. Yeah, maybe 24, 25. I graduated at 23. The two-part circle era was probably 23, 24, and then the coalition was about 24. It was about 25.

*Christina Strasburger:* How do you think that being gay made your life different from the way it would have been if you didn't not have the identity?

*Kevin Taylor:* We need to take a pause. I have amazing relationships with women. I know myself to be the marrying kind. I find that I think all the time if I were a heterosexual identified man in this skin, as close to this me as I would still be if I had a different orientation cause so much of my experience, but if I sit in this seat, I think about this me, the way I've operated in the world, if I just happened cause we always like to say I just happened to be gay, but I hate that. If I were a different orientation or the mirror of reflection of

myself, I think I'd be a father of five children and have grandchildren by now and hopefully still be this exuberant, but the idea of partnering is a lot easier in the construct that it is a lot of gay men talk about being partnered but for me—

- I didn't tell you this, my coming out story sounds like a nerd reading a newspaper folded in quarters. Imagine a paper, you fold it in half so that the bottom line, and then you fold that in half, right? Then I'm reading a story, but apparently on the front page of it, which my mother had been looking at, was a story about Anita Bryant, the Florida former beauty contestant who now decided she was gonna be an advocate against those homosexuals trying to adopt in 77, and so my mother asked a 13-year-old queer boy in the projects, "Baby, you ever gonna get married?" My response was, "Yes ma'am, as soon as they make it legal," and I turned the newspaper and that was the only conversation my mother and I ever had about my sexual orientation, the only one. Yes, ma'am, as soon as they make it legal.

I know that even the boyfriend, the first boyfriend in college, we talked about it. He's like you ever—he lived in a different room but he even bought something for his room and said I think this will go great in our apartment if we lived in the same place because everybody knew that's the me I always presented. It's very interesting because even a really good friend, who I remember being there for the loss of his mother. My mother used to always ask about him, and then he was there for the loss of my mother, admitted to me the other day in recent days a crush of me, and he was like you were always a fantasy. I was like well, why? He's in California, so we had this engaged conversation about that and I thought [00:40:00] this is the reason my autobiography is called never do much cause I felt like too much. My entire life and so many guys that I've known has said stuff to me, they're like, "I

never dated you cause I would have gotten lost in you. I never dated you because dating you would have been like dating the universe.” I was like who says this stuff to people? Who says this? There's always this you're so bi—you're so much, so it plays that role.

I mean, to be this man now in Newark was a son who lives here who has his own family. More to the question of who I would be if I were differently oriented would be who would I be if I didn't have my son, cause my son saved me from lonely, from the kind of lonely that makes us make horrible choices or get swallowed up by depression. He saved me because he woke me back up with—“Hey dad, what are you doing?” I didn't need a child. When he came, he was 13. God knew I needed a ready to roll, “Hey dad, what are you doing?” First, his mother's a lesbian woman and she's partnered, so it was a real kind of adopting a boy who spends every waking hour with me because he's my son. He's still your son, but let me be his father, and I don't know who I would be if God had not sent my son into my life.

When I tell you I don't know, let me give you a quick antidote. When I was growing up in DC, in that era we were just talking about, I used to—I was like oh, I have a good government job and live is good. I have my own apartment now, and so I remember having a particularly Mary Tyler Moore type kinda moment, cause only kind of visual that I could was this coat that I'd gotten from some thrift store that I really loved, which was a department store, bought something for each of my siblings and my mother for Christmas, went to the gift wrapping section to have it wrapped so that I could have them when I walked into the house, the bags were wrapped, even if they came by cause they ain't live with me. I just needed to walk in with wrapped gifts cause I'm not wrapping gifts. I don't have time for that. This particular Christmas eve, I don't

remember why this year, I think its cause '89 was the year I got involved with the coalition, so I remember being particularly busy so that I didn't end up working full time at my job now and I'm really in that end of the year budgets and all of that. Forgive my voice, I do not sound like this.

I remember after the gift wrapping, getting in a cab. If you go home, again, it was a whole fully realizing experience getting in the cab and on the way home, I said "God, this is really great, but I don't wanna be this guy." I don't wanna just be shopping and just be spending money and start thinking oh, the way I fulfill my life is to buy stuff and have fabulous pays if I don't have anybody in it. I think I'm ready to—and I really thought I was gonna say ready to be married, but I said I'm ready to be a dad cause I think all of this resource is supposed to take care of somebody, and I don't care if it's grown person. So I remember thinking maybe I'm supposed to do a big brother program or mentor or something, but whatever it is I'm ready. I remember thinking that in the cab. Then I really got fully invested in community efforts, and I think that next year I became the chair of the DC Coalition or the male co-chair, so I thought oh that's what you mean, that's what you mean. Oh, good. All this community work came and I thought that's how God was answering the, "I'm ready, I'm ready."

There's a lot in between there so DC government, BET, leave there, move to New York with BET, leave BET, move to New Brunswick to Pastor, sitting in a warehouse preaching, adopted son in the front row, talking about Gods never the less blessing in spite of all you've been through. There was a thing that God has for you and nevertheless, it will come to pass. While I'm preaching, speaking out loud, the voice of God in my ear says do you remember when we had this conversation? I'm like what are you talking about? I'm trying to think and talk and hear. What are you

talking about? My son's in the front row looking like this [00:45:00] because he's read my sermon and he's looking like that's not what's on the paper. How are you doing this? Nevertheless, it—nevertheless, it's never too late. Your season's not done. You will have—da, da, da. Do you remember when we had this conversation? What ba,ba,ba? In my mind, I go back to when was this conversation? Last year, nope. When I first moved to—nope. Keep going, keep going, keep going. It was Christmas, oh my God. It was Christmas Eve, Christmas Eve of the year I turned 25, and I said I'm ready to do more. That's when we had this conversation. That's when I said I'm ready for whatever you have for me God. God said and what was the date? I said Christmas Eve of that year I turned 25. God said what was the date? It was December 24, 1989, and when was your son born? December 24, 1989.

*Christina Strasburger:* Oh.

*Kevin Taylor:* He was born the day I prayed. Then it just took a while.

*Christina Strasburger:* That's beautiful.

*Kevin Taylor:* Yeah, it shook me to convulsions cause this was the Sunday he decided to sit in the front row, and he's looking at me like I'm a Rockstar and then that's what the serm—and I was like oh my God. He's 14, so it took—but yeah. that, cause I—even now at 53, there are guys in the community who where people would naturally say oh, I think he likes you. I was like listen, I don't care that he's in his 30s or his 40s, that's' my son. I can tell by the way he engages me. I can tell by the way he calls upon me, and I don't get lost in the ego of oh, he's attractive. Oh, he really likes you. My best

friend, that people go why aren't you and David, why aren't you partner? Cause I knew who David was when I met him and I mentored him into the man he is today. When I met David I would say he was beige, brown, he was grey, brown, and navy blue. Now he's full technicolor. "Buy that necklace, what's wrong with you? Put that on." "Oh, its too much." Somebody would go by and go, "That is fabulous." "I don't know this woman. I didn't pay her no money. All that chocolate skin and you scared to be big. Put this shirt on." "Its too loud." "Its not. You're too quiet." Now, people are saying now turned that in to something turn that into—no, I'm not trying to train my partner into being the second we go down that path, I'm clear about who you aren't.

*Christina Strasburger:* That's a nice phrase. Now, let's talk a little bit about—

*Kevin Taylor:* Lets talk.

*Christina Strasburger:* - Newark.

*Kevin Taylor:* Lets come to Newark.

*Christina Strasburger:* Lets come to Newark.

*Kevin Taylor:* Lets come to Newark.

*Christina Strasburger:* We're here. What's your earliest memory of Newark? When did you come—

*Kevin Taylor:* It's really funny cause it wasn't until I moved to Newark—I moved to Newark in early 2002, after leaving BET and trying to live in Harlem for a year after that in pastoring and realizing what a hard



struggle it was for members who really did pastor to get into the city. I was like I gotta get into Jersey, and Aaron, Aaron Frasier was a part of LIT, he's like there's a warehouse loft downtown and you need to go look at it. I walked in, I was like this is everything I've ever wanted, ever, and I didn't even know that everything that I ever wanted. I moved downtown to 197 Market Street, moved downtown to 197 Market Street in the spring of 2002, and one day walked out on a Tuesday morning to get my haircut across the street and to go to the market that was on Mulberry Street. There was a seafood market and then there was a full-on market. I go to the seafood market and get some catfish, some salmon, some shrimp. Then, I would go to the market and get five pounds of turkey wings, five pounds of chicken wings. I remember it cause the first time I went, on my way back, I looked down the street and saw Murphy's. I was like I've been in there bef—ahh, I've been to Newark before. Oh my God. I came back here in the '80s and drove up from DC where my friends were like—we drove up to New York to a play [00:50:00] and when we wanted to go out afterwards for whatever reason, they came to Murphy's, not to some club in New York.

A couple of times when we came up in the 80s and 90s, we always came to Murphy's because it felt like the Bachelor's Mill and the Brass Rail in DC. Neighborhood bar where you could talk to people. They had a couple of those in Dupont circle, but not one that was black. The black old spots were in the hood in DC. The spots we went to dance, spots where we could hang out, and I think that's what we liked about it. It wasn't so loud that you couldn't meet people. The New York clubs so loud and so Dupont Circle, and we wanted somewhere we could have a drink, meet some people, meet some friends. I moved to Newark in 2002, but I had come here several times in the '80s and '90s in excursions to New

York City that brought sanctuary in Newark. Even one time we were gonna head back home to DC. We were literally gonna drive up, see the play, come back home, and then I'm getting drunk at Murphy's and a friend ya'll can stay at my house, and so we ended up leaving on Sunday morning.

I remember downtown Newark really, really well. I mean, literally, like a flash of the lifetime of it came when I was walking back home with the groceries and I was like that's why I like the place so much. I say to this day, Newark reminds me of the DC that DC is no longer. Very urban, very connected, very community, very galvanizing, even in its conflict, and it feels so much more, like the city of my childhood than even the city.

*Christina Strasburger:* Okay. Do you remember any other clubs, bars, or spaces where you would – or was Murphy's really what stayed in our mind?

*Kevin Taylor:* Murphy's is—I might even remember neighborhoods where people lived where we would go to—Murphy's was the place that we went to clubs but in the '80s and '90s, you were more likely to be coming up to a house party, somebody's house on south 16, somebody's house or on Elizabeth or in Chancellor, those things I remember. When I have the flashbacks, its we came up—we drove. I remember driving up to house parties where people's houses in Newark. I remember coming up here and never seeing New York City. We stayed in New York, shopped downtown, drove away. Yeah, I remember that and that's probably why I have such a warm connect to it because I spent more intimate time in people's personal space than I spent kind of coming for events. There was not NJPAC, there was no Prudential Center, there was—being form DC, quite frankly, anything I wanted to see was coming to me, so there was not a real reason to come up for a lot of

stuff. I do remember one time my friends and I coming up for a short crossroads in New Brunswick, the Crossroads theater, and afterwards, we drove up, we drove up to go hang out in cause we didn't know anything about New Brunswick and we new Newark was only 30 minutes away.

*Christina Strasburger:* How as Newark changed from your perspective and your time from the memories you've had before to where it is now, and are there ways that it's changed that you think most people might not be aware of?

*Kevin Taylor:* I think that—if you catch my timeline, I moved to Newark downtown, not 197 Market Street, right by the old Paramount theater, right where now there's a Golden Crust franchise across from the Dinosaur Barbeque place, and I was downtown at a time where about seven o'clock, downtown Newark shut down. There was nothing, nobody except a chicken wing spot that might still be on the corner, it's almost at the corner of broad and market, and I went there. I remember that because I like to cook, but once a week I would go to the chicken wing spot to get two turkey burgers, and I remember knowing the guys in the neighborhood. It was always kids gathered getting food or afterschool stuff. I was with Chase Bank before it was Chase. I think it was Nation's Bank, and it was around the corner on Broad Street. I would do all my banking around that corner.

I remember the day that I came into a chicken spot while I was waiting for my two turkey burgers, I turned around and realized that all these kids were there, [00:55:00] but they weren't loud and rakish like they have been, they weren't funding, they weren't acting up and cutting up. I felt the sense of Solomon. I remember walking past and one of them had peeled a rainbow sticker and put

it on the table and written the name Sakia, and I found out when I got back upstairs about the murder of Sakia Gunn on Sunday night into Monday. This was Monday afternoon. I remember thinking something just happened. For that many kids to be that solemn, I remember being at a gathering at a rally, right at the corner where she was killed. That's where I met now senator Cory Booker when he was not yet mayor. That's when I fell in love with Cory Booker, not yet mayor. It was funny cause I say out loud that because Cory Booker's not a gay man, or not a gay identified man, that's why I love [inaudible 56:08]. That's what helps me. We fell in love—I mean, love, love. I remember speaking at a rally at Military Park to introduce him and he said if I were gay, Rev. Kev would be my husband. When he married the couples at city hall, I said nine couples got married tonight and because God is great, perhaps the senator elected, I will be couple number ten. That was almost a decade later, and I said remember when we met on the corner of Broad and market at the rally? He said oh, no, no, but the last time we were together is when I said you would be my husband if I were gay. I'm very clear about who you are.  
Can you pause?

*Christina Strasburger:* Mm-hmm.

*Kevin Taylor:* What time is it? Oh, I thought you were looking at your phone.

*Christina Strasburger:* 2:44, Do I have extra time? Okay, thank you.

*Kevin Taylor:* Oh, good.

*Christina Strasburger:* Oh, please go back. Have you been in touch since to remind him of—

*Kevin Taylor:*

Oh, yeah. I mean, yeah. Cory and I have an adora—that's a whole nother thing. He plays probably a tiny role in my love and affinity for Newark, and I saw him at North Jersey Pride like two years ago, and some people parted, and somebody moved—that's where it was moving, and somebody moved out of the way and he looked up and he said I love you, I love you, and we hugged for like 30 seconds. I really do have quite an affinity for him, and I think—I mean, I always—you know, it's a whole nother story. The story of Kevin and Cory is so real that the sequel to my first novel *Jaded* is called *Envy*. In that book, I am represented as a television mobile by the name of K. Edward Taylor because that's my middle name, so I'm just referenced in there. My husband in the story is ahh, his name in the story is Cory T. Washington, Cory T. Washington and he's a politician, and it's very easy cause who in history is T. Washington? Booker T. Washington. Yeah, I have quite the affinity for him.

*Christina Strasburger:* We'll take a minute on that.

*Kevin Taylor:*

We will. We'll come back to it because, oh, mom I don't want—I love thee. I love he.

*Christina Strasburger:* Have you lived any place else in Newark or did you stay in that loft—

*Kevin Taylor:*

Oh no. I was only in that loft for a year and it ended up, the next year they were trying to go up on rent like 40 percent and I was like so you're making me go from \$1,000 to fourteen hundred, that's not happening. you're not doubling my rent in two years. You're not doing that.

*Christina Strasburger: 2002 to 2003 or 2003—*

*Christina Strasburger: 2002. Its 2002 to 2004, early 4. Oddly enough, I really believed I was here just to be a presence for Sakia Gunn in that time because there was rallies, there was LIT strong presence at her funeral. I remember—was I driving at the time? Yup. I had a jeep and I went to go get Bishop Jacquelyn Holland who pastored with LIT and we were going to Perry's funeral, and we parked at an off street and turned the corner to go the funeral, and as we were walking, we were like—it was a quiet day. It wasn't bad. As we approached the funeral home, it seemed as though the entire school was there and there were kids [01:00:00] sprawled in the street and every expression of grief you could imagine, anger, wailing, fighting. You know, like the fighting of get off me, not each other, just trying to pull somebody from—and they were fighting with the grief of somebody that just let me back in there. Literally as we were walking Reverend Alicia Heath Toby and Reverend Leslie Oliver, I think were coming—I think they came towards us. They were just kind of preparing us for how bad things were, and we never even got in the building. We did ministry work in the streets to deal with the grief, to pick some kids off of the floor because it got so big and out of hand, the police came and we interacted with the police and it was interesting because it was a lesbian police officer who approached us. It was real clear, they were trying to get outta hand. The police came with her and she was like we gonna work with y'all because we need to. This doesn't need to become something else, and so they let us take the lead and we kinda had to get everybody together cause her coffin was getting ready to come out and then the casket needed to leave. The overt symbol becomes a whole nother kind of thing to struggle with. We*

worked with them, we did a prayer outside. We got some of the kids together so they could march with the coffin. Sharpe James made the gymnasium at Essex County College available for kind of a community repast, but it really was just a gathering space cause I think they might have sent some sort of truck or something that had hotdogs, but these kids weren't trying to eat. They didn't care about that. I remember us going out on MLK and then the limo turned right to go down Springfield, I think it was or to West Market.

*Christina Strasburger:* West Market.

*Kevin Taylor:* Yeah, and we left to go to the college cause otherwise, it felt like the kids were gonna try to follow the limo the whole ride. It just wasn't handled right. The school didn't handle the kid's grief well. They didn't sound grief counselors, they didn't honor. Mayor Sharpe James walked into address the kids and when he walked in, every one of them walked out. They didn't even far, they just walked out into the lobby until [inaudible 05:39] and he said his little piece and when he left, they came back in, but I've never been prouder of a group of young people, that that overt, act of protest was just masterful. They were like we don't wanna hear anything you have to say cause you didn't wanna hear anything we had to say, so bye. That had such weight to it that at the time, as I said, I was pastoring in New Brunswick. I moved to New Brunswick. I was like, I need to be closer than close and thank God for that cause I was there when Tyler Clementi thing happened. I was a chaplain on Rutgers campus and so we were there for that working with community groups. Then, there just came a point when we knew it was time to come back to Newark.

*Christina Strasburger:* Can you just actually for the timeline, when—

*Kevin Taylor:* The timeline, I was here from 2 to 4, New Brunswick from 4 to 12 and have been back here since 12.

*Christina Strasburger:* Okay. You were there for—

*Kevin Taylor:* I'm a pastor of the church for a dozen years.

*Christina Strasburger:* Yes.

*Kevin Taylor:* Yeah.

*Christina Strasburger:* Okay. While you were here, I would say just to go back, what do you think that has happened in the city and the types of change that have made that people are not really aware of maybe more than they should be?

*Kevin Taylor:* I think that—the good thing about, again, my affinity for Newark is that even being in New Brunswick, New Brunswick felt like work. It felt like the assignment so I was there to pastor. I always came back to Newark to be. Because I was in a unity church and it was a unity church, unity fellowship church in here, we worshiped together all the time. Bishop Holland was a mentor, was with her all the time and I mean, God, I've been in Newark enough to see the birth of the LGBT center, to hear the reputation of organizations not working together and having been here for every Newark Pride, you know what I mean, to see groups build community and learn the art of engagement. You need to know so and so, I tried to talk to her. She don't like me. So and so what's wrong with you? I don't know. We never had a problem. I said



okay. Oh, so you two don't even know each other. To see some of the dynamics of the LGBT community where there's conflict, where the men and women just think they don't get along and I was like, yeah, ya'll made that up. I have friends [01:05:00] who come to my church now and one dude's like, "I know you have so many women in your church and so many lesbian women." I was like, "You go to any church, there's gonna be more women than men, what are you talking about? That's what's kept the church alive". Oh, what you're thrown by is that all those women have a male pastor.

That's what you're talkin' about, but those kinds of things, I think that Newark has done the great work of growing but not outgrowing. When you see the whole foods, when you see the apartments above it in the Hahne's building where you see some of the high end law stuff popping up, those are spaces where people kind of work in the first place, so they become kind of revitalized urban dwelling places, but Newark has been pretty I think and somebody might cut my throat for it, I think it's been pretty masterful at keeping community the fact that the Artisan Collectives still exist down the street from Prudential headquarters where that kind of conglomerate would have normally wiped everything small off the block, but you still have the Artisan collective, you still have Marco Hall, you still have My Chic Nails. I remember how glorious I felt walking down Halsey Street one day for whatever reason I walked down Halsey street cause I'm always here, I would love—and the first time I discovered Marco Hall's shop. It is beautiful white sequins gown and I was like— I mean, I'm the kinda gay man who's thinking first of all, can I buy this dress and cut it up to make—can I make a coat? Can I do something with it? The sequins on it was stunning, but because I have such an affinity for women, my immediate thought was what

woman do I know that really should be wearing this gown? You know, you think oh, my girlfriend needs—my friend girl that I thought no, I need to take a picture of this gown and send it to Natalie. Look at this gown. I saw it in a window in a shop. Ping. Is this a wait I'm gonna call you. “Hey, is this a designer with his own shop, a shop that features a designer, or is it a designer with his own shop, no, is it a designer in a shop? A shop that's featuring a designer, which means he doesn't have—or a designer with his own shop.” “Wait a minute Natalie, what?” “Is it a designer in a shop? Is it a shop? The designer, you know the designer, but it's not a shop. It's a shop that just has this designer stuff in his store or is it a designer with his own ship?” “I don't know.” “Well, see if you can”—“okay”, so now I come down to New Brunswick. I mean, now I gotta come down to Halsey Street by next day and I think I live in the Colonnades right now so I walked down here and I passed Marco's shop and the signs is open, and I walked in and I said I have a friend that I really think would be interested in this gown. I was wondering if you—and I took another picture and she said take it outta the window. Let me see. I brought it into the shop and took a picture. He says actually, “I have a picture of a model in the dress,” so he texted it to me and I texted it to her. She goes ohhh, that's beautiful. He said, “what's your name?” he said Marco Hall. I said, “Give me your phone number. I have a friend who wants to call you and she's really interested in the dress. She thinks it's beautiful.” He goes, “Who's your friend cause I think its unusual for a man to be shopping for a woman.” I said, “It's Natalie Cole.” “What?” He goes, “Are you her stylist or something?” “No, we're friends.” She sees the picture of the model, she's like ah, it's everything. She gets his phone number and she calls him, or does she? No. I think she calls me. Let me speak to him. Marco Hall, Natalie Cole. Natalie, its Marco and he

goes ah, da, da, da, da, and my proudest moment is when Natalie Cole pulled up to 29 Halsey Street.

*Christina Strasburger:* When was this?

*Kevin Taylor:* Like five years, five, six years ago. Pulled up to 29 Halsey Street and when she left, she left with about eight or nine Marco Hall pieces and I'm like, "Hey, Marco, you see this picture of Natalie in your dress? She's in Jakarta look at that. Look at Natalie in your dress in Singapore. Look, look, look, look." That, for me, I think because Newark sits in the shadow of New York City, that even Newarkers sometimes don't unpack all the nuances of what is here. To see people walk by and not realize it's an LGBT center, **[01:10:00]** to see people not know this designer's right here about the Artisan Collective. I think because of a place like 27 Mix, people might—but you know because it's so industrial, by the time they arrive, all those businesses are literally closed, but Marco, honestly, I think Marco's presence changed the way people saw the neighborhood because his models, mannequins were always sitting in the window, so I think it made others kind of determine, predetermine how they present their pretense on Halsey Street. That's the thing that I think that has changed about Newark for the blessed best, that there are small businesses that cause Halsey Street to be shut down so that they can all come to the street and people go, "Oh, this is down here, I'm gonna shop right here." I did this right here. I think the fact that these two are learning how to dance together and coexist kind of the augmentation and elevation of small businesses while big things show up. Marcus Samuelsson does it. I wanna see Marcus Samuelsson's new restaurant. I'm not gonna stop eating at Chess House Soul Food because it's the only place I don't eat besides my own kitchen. It's

the only place I eat besides my own kitchen. I don't care how fru fru this place is, he can't make Miss Eva's chicken wings. He can't make Miss Eva's corn, he cannot make Miss Eva's macaroni and cheese, he can't make Miss Eva's yams and I appreciate that you got fru fru, I might come in for a lounge, I'm going to Chess House Soul Food to eat and I discovered Chess House Soul Food after John's and Jay's both closed and I was like I can't believe Newark doesn't have a good soul food place anymore, and I was driving down Broad Street. I decided, I was like well, I can learn to try it if it's horrible, and I walked in there one night and got a chicken wing dinner with I think macaroni and cheese and greens and I was still living in New Brunswick, so this might have been 11.

*Christina Strasburger:* Oh, okay.

*Kevin Taylor:* I was like hmm. Better open the box and I was like ohh, did that tasted it and [*sings high note*]

*Christina Strasburger:* You got your voice back.

*Kevin Taylor:* [*sings high note*] That's funny. I'm telling you I have top register. It's my lower register that's gone.

*Christina Strasburger:* When you moved back from New Brunswick, you went to the Colonnades?

*Kevin Taylor:* Yup, directly, and I'm still there.

*Christina Strasburger:* And you're still there, okay.

*Kevin Taylor:* I don't think I'm ever leaving there.

*Christina Strasburger:* Okay.

*Kevin Taylor:* The views are spectacular.

*Christina Strasburger:* They are.

*Kevin Taylor:* And I'm only on the ninth floor.

*Christina Strasburger:* Are there any things about Newark now that you're finding particularly frustrating or you found difficult by living here?

*Kevin Taylor:* There was a whoa is us mentality sometimes that stops people from coming together, working together, reaching out to each other that is exhausting to me. I think watching Newark continue to play small when it's a lot bigger than it gives itself credit for is an issue for me. Like in a meeting I was just in with a group I'm a part of called United. We're like where's the LGBT commission and what do they do and how come they're not a part of a group called United? How do we kind of all get to the table. Its not like we're some sort of magnanimous city that needs five or six different kinds of groups. We should all be at the same table so that when a young lady gets beaten on Broad Street, we speak with one voice so that when Pulse happens, we're all at the rally in one voice so that—and so, that's particularly frustrating, still trying to figure out the dance of coexistence while they allow everybody their own sense of expression and their own thing of who they are and where they are. It can be something to see us not figure out how to be together. I think because of that, I find myself over extending myself, hello. Because I will show up here, here, here, and here so that people say see, we can work together, see, all you have to do

is ask. See. I feel particularly honored that when Rodney Gilbert, a Newark icon, passed that his mothers people found me and I just met his mother as he was on his deathbed and I was the person that she said just really spoke volumes to something of something and that community come together spirit that he had that she saw in me, but I'm here and I'm not going anywhere, so the frustration doesn't become inaction, it just becomes the stuff of flushing.

*Christina Strasburger:* [01:15:00] I love that phrase.

*Kevin Taylor:* You get the doodoo out and you flush it. Now, let's work.

*Christina Strasburger:* I'm just gonna ask you a couple more questions cause I don't wanna drain your voice.

*Kevin Taylor:* Can you pause?

*Christina Strasburger:* Yes.

*Kevin Taylor:* I know there's some ginger ale in the—

*Christina Strasburger:* What places in Newark do you associate with LGBTQ people?

*Kevin Taylor:* Of course, the LGBT center, the artisan collective because I've been to a lot of spoken word things there, a lot of community gathering things there, a lot of introducing new talent. Rutgers campus especially, the Robeson center, I've been to a number of things there. Spoken at an equality concert, and I used to be a part of a thing called Safe Zone, an LGBT safe space group on the campus of Essex County. We used to do that every week. Unity, of

course my church, Unity Fellowship Church, Newark. I mean, yeah, those places, yeah. That's kinda it.

*Christina Strasburger:* Okay.

*Kevin Taylor:* I know a lot of the community gathers in Kilkenny's a lot, but until I met June Dowell-Burton for a meeting there two weeks ago, I never entered the door ever.

*Christina Strasburger:* Why?

*Kevin Taylor:* I don't know. It was nothing personal; I just was like I've never been in Kilkenny's. This is crazy. Washington park, because we've done Pride there for so many years, Military park because we do it there now, Lincoln park cause Lincoln park on the Saturday for the house music festival is the most universal LGBT ally, friend, family, not gay dancery in the world.

*Christina Strasburger:* Say what?

*Kevin Taylor:* There was not a single—it is so universal that it's no labels, all labels. Can I take this?

*Christina Strasburger:* Yes.

*Kevin Taylor:* I just wanna see what he needs to say. Hi baby.

*Christina Strasburger:* Did this turn off? Alright. You talked a little bit about the places here in the city that you associate with the community, but have you found community of support from other people in Newark or elsewhere? You say the church is a large source of—

*Kevin Taylor:* Say that again, have I found—

*Christina Strasburger:* Community or support from other people here in Newark or elsewhere, community and support,

*Kevin Taylor:* Yeah, again, some of what I like about Newark is that it's warm. I sit on the stage with Mayor Baraka for Rodney's service on Friday and then see him at a house party at the terrace ballroom on Saturday. Any time I see the mayor out he, hey pastor and shakes my hand. Support is really as broad as I think one's accessibility to it. From the mayor down. I have a pretty solid relationship with people like Dana Rone. I remember when work calling into the register's office cause now the Essex County registrar and being there for an hour because she's like oh, what's up Pastor Taylor? I'm in her office and hey, you all are looking for a church space. Call them, reach out to them. I think that some of the frustration I have is because of some of the universal support I've received, and I hate that people suggest that support is because it's me. The support is cause I asked. You have not because you asked not. I don't like the idea that it just came to me cause it was me, it came because I asked for it, because I went looking for it cause I needed it and because I have pastored people who have never stepped into my church, right, and because I've visited that same grace in somebody, I'm thrown when they suggest that it was kind of some sort of favoritism, that was the reason. I was like no, that's favor. There's a difference. The favors out, you've got my phone number to. Like somebody said, "Oh, he won't answer the phone when I call," but I'll call 'em and then answer the phone. He's like, it's my cell phone. "I didn't expect you to answer." "Why, it's my cell phone." [01:20:00]



That's what I like about Newark. Newark is resourceful. It's resources full. People figure out a way. What I think about kind of the support for it, I remember when I met a pretty well-known Newark artist by the name of Akintola Hanif, photographer or magazine publisher, all around light of the world, and he was the first brother, the first person with whom I started to think now that I do with every man I meet, and it is also shifted the way I gauged the women, I meet. We were the first two brothers that—eh was the first person with whom I shared the exchange of King. “Hey King, how's it going da, da, da, da, da,” It literally shifted something in me when he said that the first time. I think he said it to me first time and it just set right. It was like everything about black men that I love, everything about men that I love, everything about life that I love woke up in that exchange, “Hey king, hey. How's the magazine coming? Its good da, da, da. I need”—I don't know, just everything about him. When I see him in the passing, when I see him in engage in the exchange of—and it just broadened the world. It broadened the way I saw myself. It broadened the way that I saw other black men, it broadened the way that I engage women. “Hey Queen, good morning Queen.” It just broadened the way I showed up. It will probably end up being the name of my foundation, like the King foundation. It was that pivotal. Kindness, integrity, nobility, and grace, King.

*Christina Strasburger:* I love that. I think were gonna end there and I'm gonna thank you so much for spending this time with me. You have to pastor for tomorrow, so I am going to give your voice a rest. Thank you so much.